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SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y . CHANGING CLASSIFICATION REASON
FROM 1.5 TO 1.4

DEPT FOR EUR/WE LEVIN; NEA/RA; NEA/NGA;DRL/IRF DEATHERAGE,
ABRAMSON

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TAGS: IZ KIRF PHUM PREL SOCI VT

SUBJECT: NEW IRAQI AMBASSADOR CALLS FOR TIGHTER BORDERS,
MORE SECURITY TRAINING

Classified By: Ambassador Jim Nicholson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Iraqi Ambassador to the Holy See Edward Ismail Yelda called for tighter controls on his country's borders in a December 16 meeting with the Ambassador. He urged particular attention to the Jordanian border, which he cited as a source of foreign fighters and weapons. Yelda said the situation in Iraq called for more coalition troops, and also advised more comprehensive training and more careful screening of Iraqi security forces. Yelda described the ongoing security concerns affecting Iraq's Christian community, asserting that Baathists seeking to build support for a return to the old regime were primarily responsible for the attacks on Christians. Yelda said coalition and Iraqi forces needed to be more aggressive against the insurgents, as they had been in Fallujah. Yelda thanked the Ambassador warmly for the U.S. intervention in Iraq, and said the U.S. would be needed there for some time to come. End Summary.

Watch the Border with Jordan

¶2. (C) Iraq's new Ambassador to the Holy See, Edward Ismail Yelda, called for tighter controls on his country's borders in a December 16 courtesy call on the Ambassador. Yelda noted that Iraq's borders with Iran and Syria needed to be tightened, but became animated as he turned to Jordan. "No one will talk about this problem because of political considerations," he said, "but there are many evil people in Jordan" who are undermining Iraqi security. He claimed that the Jordanian border was loose, due to border guards accepting bribes on both sides. He worried about the "many trucks" that cross into Iraq, apparently uninspected. Jordan and other countries, Yelda declared, had yet to "get the message" about halting the flow of terrorists, arms and money into Iraq.

More Coalition Forces, More Training for Iraqis Needed

¶3. (C) Ambassador Yelda also called for more coalition forces in Iraq. Aside from their obvious help in maintaining order, he said that the greater visibility such troops would be an important factor in sending a psychological message of stability. Expanded training and more effective screening of Iraqi security forces was urgently needed, he said. Commenting on problems with Iraqi security forces, Yelda claimed that Baathist elements had infiltrated the Iraqi forces, resulting in the common use of police or other security service uniforms in many kidnappings and other crimes. In fact, Yelda recounted how he himself had been the target of an assassination attempt in which a bomb had exploded at his residence. Several men posing as security agents arrived in uniform in the aftermath of the explosion and attempted to take the wounded Ambassador away. Yelda said he was able to hold them off until legitimate authorities arrived, at which point the impostors fled. (Note: Yelda said he had been injured in the blast and had undergone medical treatment in England on two separate occasions for his injuries. End note.)

Baathists Behind Violence; Christians at Risk

¶4. (C) Yelda acknowledged that foreign elements were carrying out many of the terrorist bombings in Iraq, but maintained that Baathist elements were pulling the strings. For Yelda, the targeting of Christian churches was a particularly unsettling aspect of the terror. He said the Baathists wanted to make the point that the new government

could not or would not protect Christians -- this in comparison to the relatively secure situation for Christians under Saddam. Yelda described a difficult situation for Christians, claiming that since April insurgents had killed Christian women or girls at the rate of nearly one per day. He said interim government officials had asked "the Americans" to do more to protect Christians, but with little improvement in the situation, many were fleeing the country. The Ambassador assured Yelda that protection of Christians was a key USG priority, reflected both in frequent contacts between our Embassy in Baghdad and Christian leaders as well as in our Embassy's contact with the Holy See.

15. (C) As a Christian, Yelda said he felt a special responsibility to help protect his co-religionists in Iraq. Though he is a member of the Assyrian Church of the East and not a Catholic, he will find common ground with the Vatican on this issue. (Note: Unlike the Chaldean Catholic Church, the majority Christian group in Iraq, the Assyrian Church of the East is not in union with Rome. The Chaldeans share common roots with the Assyrians, dating back to the second century, but broke off from the Assyrian Church of the East in the sixteenth century. Following periods of acrimony, relations between the Assyrian and Chaldean Churches have improved somewhat in recent years, as have relations between the Assyrians and the Holy See. End note.)

More Aggressive Stance Needed

16. (C) According to Yelda, coalition and Iraqi forces needed to be more aggressive against the insurgents. He acknowledged concerns about violating sacred Islamic ground, but insisted that there were limits. "There are tunnels and passageways underneath these mosques" where the terrorists store weapons and "actually conduct training exercises," he said. Yelda noted with grim approval coalition operations in Fallujah, qualifying his praise only with the criticism that the crackdown should have come sooner. He implied that if the coalition and Iraqi forces were to be successful, additional similar operations would be needed in other towns.

Gratitude for Intervention

17. (C) On behalf of his people and government, Yelda thanked the Ambassador for the U.S. intervention in Iraq, and said he regretted the loss of American lives. He appealed to the USG to stay the course in Iraq, saying that U.S. forces would be needed in the country "for a very very long time." Yelda said that he was not supportive of a much larger role for the UN in Iraq at this time. According to Ambassador Yelda, the countries who had already sacrificed their soldiers and finances should be the ones to maintain influence there. In this connection, he said that he would be disappointed to see French or German influence in Iraq. Yelda was optimistic about the upcoming elections, though he cautioned that after decades of tyranny, "democracy would not come overnight." He said education and job creation would be key factors in developing a strong Iraqi democracy.

Comment

18. (C) Though the Rammadi native had been living in England since the 1970s, Yelda moved back to Baghdad last spring, and seems to have had more than his share of action since then, given the October assassination and kidnapping attempts. His background in England will continue to influence his work here. Until Yelda's arrival, the most prominent Iraqi in Vatican circles was Monsignor Philip Najim, representative of the Chaldean Patriarch. There is no love lost between Yelda and Najim, who knew each other when both lived in England. Yelda grimaced when asked if he had had much contact yet with Najim in Rome, but offered that he had invited the monsignor to accompany him to his November presentation of credentials to the Pope. Yelda claimed that many Iraqi ex-pats in London had a poor impression of Najim since, Yelda hinted darkly, Najim was sometimes identified with the old regime. For his part, Najim (protect) lambasted Yelda in a meeting with Poloff some weeks ago, calling him "worthless" and "a drunk." We saw no evidence of the latter, though Yelda did lament the tame nightlife in Rome, noting that there was much more to do in the after-hours in London.

19. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

NICHOLSON

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